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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000212

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2008

ANKARA 00000212 001.2 OF 003

In Today's Papers

Turkish Parliament to Debate Turban Reforms

All papers report that on Wednesday, the parliament will discuss the AKP-MHP proposal for lifting headscarf restrictions in universities.

Prime Minister Erdogan pledged in his ruling AKP group meeting yesterday to uphold secularism. "The new regulation will strengthen secularism. What we are trying to do is totally about the right to a university education," said Erdogan. Responding to criticism against the opposition MHP for helping the ruling AKP in the turban controversy, MHP leader Devlet Bahceli said his party was the 'strongest link' between 'Anittepe and Kocatepe,' referring to two important landmarks in Ankara: Ataturk's mausoleum and the capital's largest mosque, symbols of secularism and Islam. Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal in remarks at an event marking the 71st anniversary of the introduction of secularism into a Turkish constitution, claimed preparations for a severe blow to secularism were underway. The issue under discussion in the country is not a headscarf ban, but secularism, according to Baykal. "Erdogan says 'entrust secularism to us.' I'd rather entrust liver to a cat than secularism to you," Baykal said to his party's members. The CHP leader noted the turban was not a requirement of Islam. President Abdullah Gul, in Qatar on a state visit, told Turkish reporters the secular character of Turkey is an irrevocable quality which is one of the founding principles of modern Turkey. "We should not make some issues so tough. Opinions are expressed, everything is discussed and democratic systems operate as they should," Gul emphasized.

Liberal Radikal writes on page one that 71 years after the inclusion of the principle of secularism in the Turkish Constitution, the country is still debating the same issue.

Editorial Commentary on Turban

Ismet Berkan wrote in liberal Radikal (2/6): "The Constitutional

Court might reject the amendments that liberate the headscarf in the universities. In that case, all eyes will turn to PM Erdogan and MHP leader Bahceli. If both leaders accept this decision and say 'although we think this ruling is against democracy, we still have to abide by it,' then the crisis will not deepen. But if the both leaders object to this decision and try to amend the relevant article of the constitution, then a regime crisis will start in Turkey. In that case, no one can guess when and how this crisis will end and, despite being ruled by a single party, Turkey will become a country searching for political stability. I personally consider the possible annulment of the amendments by the Constitutional Court a serious issue, and that is why I believe that a constitutional crisis is inevitable. Only the MHP and AKP leaders can avoid deepening this crisis."

Germany Investigates Fire Killing 9 Turks

All papers report Turkish officials will fly to Germany to help police investigate the cause of a fire which killed nine Turks, including five children, in a housing block largely inhabited by Turks. The blaze took place during carnival celebrations in the western city of Ludwigshafen. The cause of Sunday's blaze in an apartment block is unclear but the tragedy raised of a targeted attack by racist groups. Prime Minister Erdogan, who is to visit Germany later this week, said a delegation headed by State Minister Mustafa Said Yazicioglu and four security officials would travel to Germany to hold talks about the fire. He noted Turkey did not want a repeat of the firebomb attack by German 'skinheads' on a house in Solingen where five Turks were killed in 1993. Erdogan said he hoped to visit the site of the tragedy on Thursday. Erdogan will meet Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday. Meanwhile, papers report 16 people were hurt in a fire in another building inhabited by Turks in Ludwigshafen.

Kurdish DTP Protests in Sirnak Turkish Raids on Northern Iraq Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Taraf, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, and Zaman

ANKARA 00000212 002.2 OF 003

report thousands of pro-Kurdish DTP supporters from several provinces gathered in Diyarbakir and later went to the border province of Sirnak to protest Turkish cross-border attacks into northern Iraq. More than 3,000 demonstrators, including DTP lawmakers and mayors, spent the night in tents in an area between Cudi and Gabar mountains. They are expected to release a statement today.

Saygun Thanks Americans for Sharing Intelligence against PKK
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Cumhuriyet, and Zaman report General Ergin Saygun, deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS), met Tuesday with General James Cartwright, the vice chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, in Washington. Saygun has been in the US since January 31 and has visited military bases and facilities. Saygun also chaired the Turkish delegation in the Turkey-US High-Level Defense Group (HLDG) talks in Washington.

Mainstream Hurriyet reports from Washington that an unidentified American source said General Saygun thanked American officials for sharing intelligence with Turkey against the PKK. "The Turkish side, for the first time in recent years, has not complained at all," the source said. Other sources said in order to back Turkey, some intelligence gathering equipment for intelligence gathering needed to be shifted to the region from places like Afghanistan. "We will continue supporting the Turkish military. Turkish air operations have dealt heavy blows to the PKK; we know the organization is puzzled and damaged," sources said. They also said for the first time since 2003, the bilateral HLDG meetings had 'a future perspective.' "All is happy with the operations which have restricted the PKK's maneuverability. More importantly, Turkish soldiers now have the means to move freely in northern Iraq. The Turkish military's view of the US is changing," sources told Hurriyet.

Turkey to Host 'African Summit' in August

Mainstream Milliyet reports Turkey is to host an 'African Summit' in August to which 53 African leaders will be invited. Turkey, eyeing a seat in the UN Security Council, aims to secure the support of African countries at the October 2008 UN vote. Libyan leader

Muammar Gaddafi, Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, and Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir would be among the invitees. Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) sources said Mugabe, a controversial figure, was invited to join a recent EU-Africa summit in Portugal, and that the Turkish invitation should pose no problem.

Editorial Commentary on Kosovo

Kamuran Ozbir commented in nationalist Ortadogu (2/6): "By electing pro-western candidate Boris Tadic as president, the Serbian people gave a message to the world that their goal is the EU membership. Tadic, just like his rival Nikolic, is not supporting Kosovo's independence but he still believes that Serbia's priority should be EU membership. Prior to the Serbian elections, Reuters News Agency claimed that, if Nikolic was elected, Kosovo would declare independence immediately this weekend, but in case of Tadic's presidency, Kosovo would abide by EU demands and wait for a few weeks. The US has already stressed support for Kosovo's independence while Russia, together with Serbia, claims that an independent Kosovo will change balances in the world.

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- The pro-Kurdish DTP leader, Nurettin Demirtas, is to appear before the court Wednesday for forging medical reports to avoid military service, which is compulsory in Turkey.

- Osman Baydemir, the mayor of Diyarbakir, has been acquitted in a lawsuit for distributing in 2006 invitations for a culture festival

ANKARA 00000212 003.2 OF 003

in several languages, including Kurdish.

- Two PKK terrorists have surrendered to Turkish security forces in Silopi in the southeastern border province of Sirnak on Tuesday.

- An OECD report says two-thirds of Turkish girls between the ages of 25-29 stay at home instead of working or going to school.

International News

- Britain's International Institute for Strategic Studies warned in its annual report on the world's military forces that strains among the Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs in northern Iraq could increase.

- The Iraqi Oil Ministry has accused Iran of stealing oil from a shared field under their common border.

- A new Iraqi flag that does not include Saddam Hussein's handwriting and the three green stars of his ousted Baath Party has been hoisted over the Iraqi Cabinet building in Baghdad.

WILSON